

00:00

(It's Tuesday, July 26th. And I'm here with Bob Oppenheimer. I am Nancy Freeman. We are here at Bob's home in Delta, Utah. And we'll just get started, Bob.)

OK.

(If you could tell me a little bit about your educational background?)

OK, I'll sure do it. The only education I got, I graduated from high school. I was goin' to college and the war started there and I never got back to what I was gonna do. So I started farming right here in Delta. I had a nice farm. They asked me if I wouldn't help 'em out some one winter, to help 'em trap. They needed a hand. And I started to trap, and then I had a guy that was darn good to me and took a interest in me, that spent so much time showing me how to do all this stuff that when spring come, I didn't have the courage to quit. So that's how I got started in trappin'. And by the way, that was October the 17th, 1956.

01:35

(Where did you grow up?)

I grew up right here in Delta. I was born in Lockport, Illinois. I moved here when I was a year old, and I've been here ever since. I went to Delta High School.

(Did you grow up hunting and fishing and trapping?)

I grew up—no fishin', just hunting. I always had a horse and really liked animals and dogs and things like that. I guess that's one reason I like this job, working with them.

(Who did you learn the most from about hunting when you were growing up?)

I just kinda learned it on my own. I always went huntin' deer with my granddad. I had some brothers, and we used to go hunting. But I really wasn't interested until I got started on this job.

02:50

(So after high school, were you drafted into the war?)

No, I enlisted in the Navy, and I spent about three and a half years in the Navy. Then I come back and started farmin'. In the wintertime I didn't have too much to do. That's why I started on this job. I was just gonna do it part-time, but I enjoyed it so much. That's why I'm still doin' it, I guess.

(Who hired you?)

Oh, a guy from Kanosh, Adria Ahlstrom, was the boss when I started. He lived in Kanosh. That's where I started to work, was in Kanosh. I moved from here to Kanosh to work there, and I worked there out of Kanosh for eight years, just as a trapper. This Adria Ahlstrom that helped me out so much decided to retire, so I took his job as the district supervisor in the southern district.

(When was that? When did you take his job?)

Oh, about 19—let's see, I trapped for eight years, and then I took that job. So it'd be about 1964. Then I moved to Richfield, they had me move to Richfield. I stayed there about four years and then they moved me back to Delta. And that's where I've been ever since.

04:26

(When you started out, what was the organization called at that time? 'Cause it was with Fish and Wildlife.)

US Fish and Wildlife Service. That's what it was called then.

(When you first started, what were your primary duties, that part-time work that you were doing?)

When I started, I just started—on this job, all you do is set traps and M44s. And you have to check 'em every day. You gotta keep a diary of what you do every day and where you work. In them days, we really spent a lot of money, a lot of time puttin' out poison. We had to put this poison out in the fall and we had to pick it all up in the spring.

(What poison was that?)

That was 1080.

(That was in the early years.)

We used it till 1972. Then it was banned.

(So you used it in addition to trapping?)

Trapping and M44s. We didn't have regulations like we got now, you know. I could set all I wanted and I didn't have to get permission from the BLM or anything. Now it's completely changed. Which is fine, you know, probably a good thing, because we work with the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service, on their grounds. We go to meetings once a year and get all the permission from all the different places. Some places we work and some places we don't, depending on if they've had problems.

06:13

(When you first started out, what was the animal that was the most problems for you in this area?)

It's always been coyotes, is the biggest problem. And then we had a problem in Salina Canyon with lions. They got so thick, they killed more on the highway that winter than they did deer.

(Lions?)

Lions. I think in two or three years there we took out about between four and five hundred lions.

(When was that, roughly?)

Oh, probably around the 1980s.

(Mountain lions?)

Yeah, mountain lions.

07:03

(You mentioned before we started the recording about a mountain lion that had killed a lot of sheep.)

Yeah, they had a lotta trouble. They'd get in the sheep and kill forty or fifty, you know. It's basically in the Salina Canyon area, that was really the worst. In one instance, this guy called me up and said they'd had lion problems. Went over there and counted 102 they'd killed that one night. All of them was lambs but about five that was ewes. They were just scattered around on that hillside. You just couldn't believe it. I started on that lion, and altogether I counted 145 sheep that lion had killed before I caught it.

(One lion?)

No, it had a big kitten with it, a yearling kitten. She was teachin' this kitten how to do it. And I caught her and they didn't have no more problems in that area, you know.

(What did you use to catch her?)

Dogs. I had some good dogs.

08:28

(Describe that. Describe catching a mountain lion.)

Well, what I'd do is get up at daylight in the morning and ride around this herd of sheep. This one morning I rode around this herd of sheep and them dogs hit that track. You couldn't see tracks on account of so many sheep tracks. But anyway, that lion—them dogs took out after this lion. They treed it in a big quaking aspen. I knew there was two lions, but I wanted to be sure and get the old one, female. She was the one, you know, teachin' the young one. Anyway, I run it up a high quaking aspen. I shot it up there, and it wouldn't fall out'a the tree. So I had to go get a chain saw and cut the tree down to see what lion I'd got. The young one was pret' near as big as the old female, you know. And it was the old female.

(So you had shot her in the tree but she had not dropped?)

Yeah, right. Every time she moved I'd shoot her again because I didn't want to make no mistake of her getting away. But I had to cut the tree down to find out. And as soon as I found out, I knew that would stop the problem.

(And it did?)

Yeah, right. They run with their mother until about a year and a half old. That's what she was doin', trainin' this kitten.

10:05

(Did you usually try to catch a lot of mountain lions, or was this an unusual situation?)

No, this was a everyday job, because some place in that Salina Canyon area they'd have trouble pretty near every day. They killed a lot of sheep in that area.

(So mountain lions are mainly in that canyon area, not so much over here in Kanosh?)

Yeah. There's quite a few in Kanosh, but we didn't have the sheep in that Kanosh area, like, that Salina Canyon area was full of sheep. And in Kanosh, there used to be some sheep. They used to run a lot of sheep south of Kanosh, above Beaver. But they sold all that to cattle, so that stopped that problem, you know. But Salina Canyon still has quite a few sheep, but not very many. I was talkin' to a trapper last night, he's camped over to Strawberry. He says they're having a heck of a time over there with bear. He was telling me about his friend that was chasing a bear the other day. It killed his dog, and that guy had been offered \$5500 for that dog. They got a bear on the ground that killed his good dog. But anyway, they've got the lion problem under control now. There's a few, but not like it used to be.

11:50

(Speaking of bears, did you do much bear work?)

I did a lot of bear work. I trapped at Salina Canyon and Soldier Summit Country for five years after retirement from the federal government. When I retired from the federal government, I went to work for the state and worked another thirteen years.

(Describe how you would trap bear in that area.)

OK. Some places we used traps and other places we used dogs, but it's really a job with dogs because they can run so far in such rough country. We'd follow—Sheep men would tell us that the bear got in the sheep the night before. We'd go there and we'd find where they'd killed the sheep. So we'd build a pen around that bear—I mean, around that sheep, and then we'd set snares. They'd come in, eat the sheep—when they'd come back to get the sheep, why, they'd get caught in the snare. But we got in a problem doing that because the last few years everybody—all the sheep men went to guard dogs, which keeps coyotes out pretty good. That's what they're supposed to do. Some do and so don't. They're like anything else, they're good and bad. The snare really worked good, but when they got the dogs, you know, we had to be careful about catchin' the dogs, because that's the first place they'd go to, was a dead sheep.

(When you first started out in what was it? 1954?)

'56.

('56, did you still then trap bears with snares, or did you use traps?)

I know we used traps for years, and then they—when we set a trap, we had to hang a clamp within reaching distance, so if somebody got caught in it, they could take this clamp and get out. We had to put a sign there, too. They were just a dangerous tool, so vicious, you know. So they outlawed that and made a snare, which is real simple now. Them snares—I mean, them traps used to be a heck of a job packing them on a horse, you know. But the snare just weighs a pound or two. There's nothing to it.

(What size of trap?)

Oh, I think this is a #14 or #16, yeah.

(And you'd have to pack it in with a horse?)

Yeah, right. And you had to be careful setting it. And all this work I'm talkin' about was alone. You know, we didn't have somebody helpin' us.

15:05

(About when did the trap ban go into effect for those traps?)

Oh, it must have been about [pause]—I would say around fifteen years ago that they outlawed the traps. So they just give us the trap. It's probably twenty-five years. 'Cause I've had that trap settin' there since we moved here.

(On your mailbox?)

Right. They just give us the traps. They'll bring quite a bit of money if you wanna sell them. They're quite an antique.

(So you started part-time and you liked the work well enough that you just stayed on?)

Right.

(You said that coyotes were usually the thing you trapped the most?)

Yeah, they was the biggest problem, 'cause there was more of them. When I started there wasn't too many lions, either. Coyotes was a big problem. They always have been in most areas. But now the bear and lion on the mountains are a problem.

(So you were district supervisor. Was it north district?)

Southern district.

(For how long?)

Twenty years.

(About how many people did you supervise?)

Seventeen. And I worked in seventeen counties in the southern states.

16:41

(As a supervisor, did you still do your own trap line?)

No, I didn't have a trap line then. I just went with trappers pret' near every day. If we hired a new guy, I'd spend a lot of time with him. But I was in the field most of the time. I had an office, but I didn't like that office work too good, you know. So [pause] I was mostly in the field, but with different people. Like I'd go over and go with Phil Taylor for a week. I'd go with somebody else, something like that.

(How long were you supervisor?)

Twenty years. Then I retired and went for the state, just as a trapper. I give the supervisor work up, you know, 'cause I wanted to get back out in the field. I went back as a trapper. In the meantime while I was workin' for the state, they had a problem with the supervisor that took my place, so they let him go and I went back to supervisin' for about five more years.

(With the federal government?)

Yeah, but I was working for the state when I was supervisor then. I worked about five years and they finally got this Mike Bodenchuc comin' in. He took my place. He moved to Richfield.

(So he was district supervisor?)

For a while. And then—he wasn't district supervisor for very long and then they made him head guy in Salt Lake.

18:27

(So you really liked field work best?)

Oh, yeah, and I still do. [Pause] I didn't like that office work at all. And now all the trappers with the computers, so it's really different now. And the guys seem to be getting along with it good. They don't have any problem with it.

(With the computers?)

Yeah. Some of them says—I didn't think they'd ever teach some of them guys, but they've done a really good job teachin'. Because so many, like me, don't like that office work. That's why they took this other job.

(When did you really retire? Or have you retired?)

I retired in '94. I think it's on that date right there. I retired from the federal government then. Then I went to work for the state and worked thirteen more years for the state. Then I quit for about a month. I retired for about a month. I could see this wasn't gonna work out, this not working. So now they pay me for my dogs and horses, and the rest is all volunteer.

(So you continue to volunteer?)

I've volunteered for five years.

(What does that mean? What do you do?)

I do the same thing as I did before, only I don't get paid. [chuckles] They pay me for my dogs and horses and furnish me a truck and all the equipment that I need. I can work when I want, so many hours. I don't hardly have anybody checkin' with me, you know. Of course I don't need anybody 'cause I know what I'm doing. Anyway, I have to make—send my time in. I have to make a—I have to do a diary just like I always did and say where I went, what time I started, what time we got back. At the end of the month I have to fill this out. I usually put between 120 and 140 hours in a month. And I've did that for five years.

(You must like the work.)

I do. And I like being outside. If I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it, you know. A lot of people think I'm crazy for doing it, but right now, at my age, I'm just about afraid to quit. I don't think if I had somethin' that wasn't important to do, whether I'd do too much.

21:50

(And I hear you're very good at your volunteer job.)

Well, I—You know, a person should be after that many years. He ought to know what he's doin'.

(Because I believe Mike Bodenchuc told me that last year you removed more coyotes than anyone else in Utah.)

Yeah, but I have a different job than most of these—these guys that work with sheep, you can't believe the difference in the type of coyotes they got. I'm out here where a lot of coyotes never seen a trap before. And I do most of my work right now in deer protection. I got a—I do a lotta—pret' near all of it's over next to the foothills where the deer do their fawning. That's where I do most of my summer work.

(Explain the difference in trapping coyotes like you do now or trapping coyotes that take sheep.)

The only thing about the ones takin' the sheep, they have so much pressure put on them from other trappers that they're smarter.

(How so?)

Because they're used to seeing these traps in the ground, and they're used to people around, they're used to people's smell. [pause] You get a certain coyote that kills sheep and sometimes they can just raise heck with you. Sometimes it takes a year to catch 'em with everything you do. But they have started using the helicopter in the wintertime. That really helps out a lot. Coyotes I'm trapping out here on the desert that don't see a trap or don't see much is twice as easy to catch as the ones that some of these guys are really havin' problems with.

23:57

(Throughout your years, did you do a lot of the trapping of coyotes for sheep problems, or was it very varied?)

No, pret' near all of it was for sheep. I don't know. Things has changed so much I can't believe it. Years ago we didn't have no problem with cattle, and now I have a heck of a job with young calves in this area.

(Coyotes taking young calves?)

Yeah, right.

(And that didn't used to be so?)

Well, I don't know, we sure didn't—in fact, a lot of cattlemen didn't want us workin', because they was killin' rabbits and things. Now we got the—altogether different. Over here to Kanosh a couple years ago, we had coyotes killin' the calves as soon as they was born, before the cow got out. They were just standin' there waitin' for 'em. We had one problem near west of Kanosh, they was doin' that. I think we got an airplane over there and I think John Flynn was a trapper over there, and I think they killed ten coyotes one day right around there, you know. That airplane is really a selective tool.

(Were you ever a gunner?)

I was. I did a lot of gunnin' in my years. And one day I was over on the Parker Mountain, you'll be close to that Parker Mountain when you go to Phil Taylor. He lives right by, and he was there that day. Anyway, we was flyin' up there, and the guy says, "Son of a gun, we're gonna hit the ground!" And we did. Pret' near demolished that airplane. This Phil Taylor you're gonna see didn't know where we went. We forgot to get him on the radio and tell him what happened, you know. [chuckles] But anyway, it didn't hurt us any, just made a sight of the airplane.

26:12

(So you had a crash?)

Yeah. Took the landing gear out and just slid along a mountaintop for quite a ways. And my wife said, "You've gotta quit that flying. It's too dangerous." I said no, I won't. So she just doubled my insurance.

(She just what?)

Doubled my insurance. [chuckles] That's been a real problem that's really been—I've lost three good—four good friends since I've been working. In 1961 I had a real good friend. Him and I was flyin'. He'd fly one day and I'd fly the next. I was supposed to go that day and I had to fix income tax, so he went, and he got killed that day. He was a real good friend. And then here ten years ago—I worked with this one pilot for twenty years. He had 22,000 hours. He was trainin' a guy named Jeff Yates. Between here and Holden they crashed and it killed 'em both. And then I had a friend, Shane Cornwall, that was killed in a helicopter about the same time. So I've—that's

really been sad experiences, especially when you work with people for twenty years, you know, and they get killed. But anyway, I was lucky. It didn't hurt me, you know. But that Phil Taylor, I'm sure he'll bring that up. [chuckles] 'Cause he was there. See, when we work with the airplane, we work with a ground crew. The ground crew locates a lot of the coyotes and sends us—we have to have somebody on the ground to keep track of an airplane all the time, from the time it leaves the airport till it gets back. So we have a ground crew all the time.

(Is that new?)

It is. We've had a lotta—when we had the first accident, we didn't even have radios, you know. We didn't have nothing. Now it's really got it improved. We have radios in. They talk to the guys on the ground, you know. We keep track of 'em from the time they leave till they get back. It's a safety factor, mostly.

29:09

(What did you like best about your work?)

I guess the best part about it, I liked to work with the trappers that I was workin' with. I didn't have nobody just lookin' down my throat or tellin' me what to do. I could use my own judgment. Bein' able to work as much as I wanted. Always worked too much, but I enjoyed it. The worst part about it was, if I had some trapper that wasn't doin' anything, that's what really got on your nerves.

(Someone you were supervising?)

Yeah. With all these regulations, state regulations, federal regulations, you know how it is to fire a person any more. I had one guy, it took me about five years to get rid of him. He wouldn't even do nothing, you know. He said he couldn't walk, he couldn't drive a truck. He was miserable and all this kind of stuff. Even then it took five years to get rid of him. Because, you know, you start firin' some state or federal guy and you've gotta have a pretty good reason.

(So that's what you liked least about your work?)

Right. But I really liked—I had about seventeen guys in that twenty years that was steady. I mean, no changes. Out of all the guys that's working now, there's only—let's see, Carlyle Rollins, Newell Fredrickson, and Roger Millers [?]. There's only about three or four guys still workin' that I worked with. Most of 'em retired, you know. But I've enjoyed every day. I guess, you asked me the part I liked. Bein' outside mostly, and workin'. I like to try to outsmart some of them animals that really gives you a problem.

(So you enjoy the challenge?)

Right, right.

(What animal is the most challenging for you?)

Oh, the coyote would be. [pause] We've had coyotes that just killed black sheep, things like that, you know. You wonder why they do it. You think you really get smart and then some old

coyote'll kill sheep for a year while you're tryin' to catch it. I had a sheep, um coyote, took me over a year to catch. Every time in the winter we'd go with the helicopter in the mountains and we'd fly that area and we'd kill a coyote or two. I'd think that'll take care of that problem. As soon as the sheep moved back in there, in the spring, the first night they'd get—in the summer, the first night they'd get there, that coyote would start workin' on 'em.

(How'd you catch him in the end?)

I finally—he finally got after my dogs one day and was in the thick timber. Them dogs was barkin' at him. He jumped up on a stump, I mean a dead tree, and just stood there long enough for me to shoot him. I'd a probably still been lookin' for that one.

33:01

(And you know he was the one?)

He was the one, yeah. I'd killed everything else there, you know, and he was still there. But I guess the challenge is probably the thing I liked. It didn't matter what kind of weather it was in, you know. We really had a good bunch'a—a group of guys working for us. But you get one that can foul up and it makes you disgusted. And when you're a supervisor, you know, that's when you—that's the hard part. [pause] But the way regulations are now, boy, you gotta be careful.

(So the most challenging part of your work was and probably still is outsmarting the coyote?)

I think so, yeah. [pause] Nothing else is that big of a challenge. Bear, lion, usually you figure them out, you know, you either catch 'em with dogs or snares. But some of these coyotes really get on your nerves. [chuckles]

(Do you have one in particular that you remember the most?)

That's the one I was just tellin' you about, that one.

34:45

(What was the most difficult social or political situation you found yourself in?)

Well, you know, I didn't have too much, on account'a—the biggest problem I had was the criticism we got from environmentalists and tryin' to work with them. Because we had at one time just really a problem with environmentalists. They was really on us. We really had to be careful how we did things and really do regulations which we really had to be careful about. We was down to Cedar one time.

(Cedar City?)

Cedar City. And we was havin' a cow problem. It was on private ground. These environmentalists knew we was comin'. So they come out there and was going to go with us to see. And it was private ground, so they just locked the gate. I stayed at the gate.

(With the environmentalists who couldn't go any further?)

Right. They was stopped there. I stayed there with 'em. They was askin' me questions and things like that. I heard that gunner tell that ground crew, I said, "We've spotted these coyotes." One lady said, "Run, coyotes, run!" Just then I heard two shots, and I said, "It's too late." [laughs]

(How did that situation come out? How did it turn out?)

Well, I don't know. They kinda relaxed a little bit. We had to change a few of our regulations and things. We had to be real sure we was workin' on coyotes that was doin' damage. We couldn't go out here and just kill coyotes, you know. We had to be careful. We had to work with the Forest Service real close. We had to work with everything. We had to get permission to fly certain areas, things like that. And it's not as bad. If it is, I don't know it, you know. I never hear. But we had some people down to Cedar City that moved here from—it was a retired doctor. He'd moved from back East, I can't remember, I think he's from Philadelphia, I'm not sure. He said that forest is theirs, them sheep shouldn't be there, all this kind of stuff. He really was a son of a gun to work with. I don't know what happened, but they lived in a little town just out of Zions [Zion Nat. Park?]. Every so often he'd have a dead cow on his lawn, and it wasn't us. It was somebody that really had it against him. But anyway, he quit comin' to meetings to raise heck. I don't know the story of what happened there. But anyway, every so often he'd get up and there'd be a dead cow on his lawn. We wouldn't'a done anything like that, but there was some livestock people that was sick of him, you know.

38:46

(So that was probably the most challenging political kind of thing?)

It was. I didn't have too much to do. The main guy in Salt Lake has to kind of do all of that. The political part wasn't too bad. Only just this was really a problem for a while.

(What's the funniest thing that's happened to you while you were capturing or handling animals?)

Oh, I just can't [pause] think—the other day I made a mistake. I do a lot of work down here at this refuge they call Clear Lake. That's about fifteen miles south of here. The coyotes come in and get the eggs around these places. I do a lot of work there.

(A lot of trapping.)

Mm-hmm. I try to keep the coyotes down in them kind of places. I was out there the other day, and I usually don't see a coyote in there. Anyway, there was a coyote in there, and my dog got after him. The dog would chase it out a ways, and then it'd chase my dog back in shootin' range. And here I am, I'm supposed to be a smart trapper, and I did not have a gun. [chuckles]

(You didn't have a gun with you?)

[chuckles] No, I had a pistol. I usually don't see coyotes in that area, you know. But that makes a guy feel kinda funny, with that much experience and a coyote runnin' your dog around. Just a few days before, I had two real nice dogs. One was a Jack Terrier and one was a Jack Russell. I was out here—they got an egg plant over here, an egg farm.

(Egg farm?)

Yea, they got a lotta chickens there, and they don't want the coyotes comin' in there, on account 'a disease. So I was out there the other day. I had my two dogs with me. I had a pup coyote in the trap. I took this pup coyote out. I went to look for that little dog and I never found her again. Never did find her. I think she went out, there was about a ten-acre patch of brush there, I think she went out there and that female coyote killed her. That really made me feel bad.

41:16

(That was just recently?)

About ten days ago. I still keep going out there thinkin' maybe she'll show up some place. It was only about a quarter mile from the egg farm. She had plenty of ways to get water and stuff like that. I looked for her for two days for her. But I never did find her.

(You probably get very attached to the dogs, don't you?)

You do. And you can't believe how smart they get when you take 'em every day. You just can't believe it. I guess that's one reason I like my job. I like them dogs. You just can't believe, in that many years, the good dogs I've had.

(Do you raise your own, or did you raise your own?)

Well, I, not very much. I usually—some of the trappers raise their own. You get one, you start with a pup. I had—of all the years I've worked, I've probably only had six or seven good dogs in that many years, you know, I mean real extra-good dogs that would do anything you want. I had one dog that I had to put to sleep two years ago that had cancer on the stomach. I just couldn't see her—she'd still go, but you could just tell every step hurt, so I put her to sleep. But anyway, we do a lot of den huntin' in the spring, you know. We find the dens. This dog, if she'd find one way out, she'd come and get ya. She knew exactly what she was huntin'.

One thing before I forget, I wanna mention one thing. In 1961 this good friend of mine got killed in an airplane. So I had to take his district, too, mine and his. I thought to myself when I started that month, "I'm gonna see how many I can get this month." I had two districts. And I think it was in April that—I think there was only one day I didn't work—in April I killed 121—dug out 121.

43:50

(Coyotes?)

Out of the dens. And we had to show proof. We had to cut off their ears.

(That's a lot.)

Yup. Never done that since.

(Describe den hunting a little and how you do it.)

OK. In about March, these coyotes start gettin' near where they're gonna have pups. A lot of time you can go out there and howl. We have a deal that sounds like coyotes howlin'—you want to turn that off for just a minute?

44:28 End of file 1

00:00

(All right, we were on den hunting.)

In March, them coyotes pick out an area that they're gonna have. A lot of times you can go in there and howl and they'll come and chase you out. 'Cause they got a territory. In fact, all coyotes got a territory. They might leave it, but they'll be back. Anyway, we started about the first of April lookin' for dens. The way we do it is, we might go out in the morning and howl, and they might answer and they might not. You just go through that area and look for tracks. That's what you go on, is tracks. It's just like a [pause] wagon wheel with spokes coming in. The den's there, and they'll be comin' in from all directions, to their den, you know. You just kinda gotta find them out kind of places. We used a lot of dogs. The coyotes—a lot of times you get close to the den and the coyote will come and chase your dog away from you.

(So that's how you know?)

Yeah, right. And then we get to a den and we got a machine that sounds like a pup gettin' hurt. Them coyotes'll come in twenty feet. They think something's got ahold of one of their pups, you know. They just forget all about fear. That's when we try to destroy 'em there.

(So you have various calls that you also use?)

Yeah, we got a lotta different kind of calls. We gotta little fawn gettin' hurt, pups gettin' hurt, rabbits gettin' hurt, all kind of calls. We gotta female coyote howlin', a male coyote howlin', and all this kinda stuff.

02:13

(Is it a recorder?)

Yeah, electric thing. I could show you. You just turn it on, battery. You can't believe the ones that's for sale now. There's a lot of 'em for sale. Anyway, that's kinda how we den hunt. We try to take the old ones, you know. If we can't take them that way, sometimes if they're in a place where they really had a problem and we really want to get this certain coyote, we'll set traps, if we can't call 'em. They work different. Some coyotes you can call and some never come back. They just—you can't depend on a coyote, you know, what he's gonna do.

(When you first started, what kind of calling things did you have?)

We didn't hardly do any callin'. This is all in the last twenty years that callin's really come in. They've made machines. I had a guy workin' for me named Milton McQueary, and that's all he did, is call coyotes. I'd send him out to a certain place, he come from Colorado and he'd been callin' over there. He come here and the guy didn't even know nothin' about it. He taught him so much. Right now he's in a rest home out here. He's 96. He don't know me from a coyote. He

don't have no idea who I am. Anyway, he kept a record, and he shot 3500 coyotes. That's all he ever did. He didn't set traps, he didn't do anything else. He just—he worked for me for ten years, but in the other time he just hunted for bounty and furs.

(He caught coyotes just with calls?)

That's all he did. He never set a trap. He never set nothin'. He just called all these coyotes in. And when he retired, [pause] he needed two more coyotes. So he went out and got two more to make 3500 even. Then he quit. And he was a expert, I'm tellin' you. He did everything just right. If he had to go out on a trouble spot, he'd go out the night before. He didn't want any kind of scene comin' in there, drivin' in there, you know. He had the patience—of when the wind's blowin' you can't call coyotes. If he got up and the wind was blowin', he'd wait till the next day, just set there and read.

05:15

(I would think there might be some wind in Utah.)

There is, yeah. Usually we'd try to do this early in the morning when it wasn't windy. But sometimes you can't do it at all. While we're talkin', another thing I should explain to you: we got three airplanes in Utah. One here, Delta, Richfield, and Salt Lake. They do some work in the summer, but not too much. But about the first of October they'll start working these sheep ranges where the sheep's goin', and all three of them will be working different places. And it's really a selective tool, because they get there in daylight and a lotta times the coyotes are right there, doing the killin'. When you get them, you know you got the right ones. It's really a selective tool.

(It sounds like it's pretty effective in some ways.)

It is.

(This leads me to my next question. What's the scariest thing that's happened to you? Was it the airplane crash or was there something else?)

No. I was talkin' about that yesterday. I was tellin' this trapper about it.

(The scariest thing?)

Yeah. That airplane happened quick, you didn't have time to get scared, you know. You just hit the ground. Anyway, I asked him if he'd been over in this certain country that I used to trap. He hadn't, and I was telling him about—I went down a real deep canyon. You can't believe the places we used to have to go, all of it on horseback, you know. I got down there and this bear had killed a sheep down there. We used to put a bit of cantaloupe in them bear pens. That smelled so much, them bear could smell them a long ways. We'd used cantaloupe, put it in there with the sheep. We got down there and it looked like I'd scared some little cubs. The snare I had set there was tripped. It looked like these little cubs had been playing around there just before I got there. It was a thick, timber-y place. I decided to try to call that old bear. I sat down—and I didn't dare. [chuckles] Because she'd come in that direction. I think that—I studied that for a long time, and I thought, "Well, which way is she going to come?" I didn't know whether she was goin' to come

or not, but I figured she would, to protect them cubs, you know. I just didn't dare do it. [chuckles] I finally got up and left.

(So you didn't call her?)

No, I didn't, I didn't dare. [chuckles] Another time, this wasn't scary either, but Lee Hintze and I was over in Monroe, that's by Richfield. We had this lion and he got up on a big high rock.

(The lion did?)

Yeah. He was fighting the dogs. One dog was bleedin'. I told Lee, I said, "We'd better kill that lion, I think." I had a kind of a small gun. Anyway, I shot that lion and that lion just went "Khhh!" and here he come right at me, you know, and run right over me.

(The lion?)

Yea, but he was just in shock. He didn't know. He was just getting out of there. He didn't mean nothing, you know. But anyway, he run over me in the snow. The snow was about this deep. Lee Anthony said, "Did he hurt you?" I said, "No, it didn't hurt me." Pretty soon the blood started running down my head: he stepped on my head! I've still got a scar there.

(Did you have to have some stitches?)

No. It wasn't that bad. But anyway, he wasn't after me. He was just getting out of there. But anyway, it give a guy kind of a funny feeling. [chuckles]

10:00

(Yeah, that might have been scary.) [laughs]

Yeah, I think that was the scariest deal. I've still got a scar to show that.

(What is your favorite lure recipe?)

The favorite lure is the urine from the coyote. That's the best.

(To catch coyotes?)

I think. But nowadays, they're—I've been using a red fox lure that's really been workin' good. I caught two old coyotes yesterday on that red fox lure that last year in that same place I caught seven or eight. I just got the traps set in there. But they really make some good lures nowadays. They didn't used to. Manufacturers used to sell them and sell them and sell them, so we used to make our own.

(In the older days?)

Yeah. But now you can buy some real good stuff. There's lots of places to buy it.

(How did you used to make your own?)

We just had certain recipes. We just mixed certain stuff together. And ah, we used to catch a coyote and pen it up with a steel bottom and keep it for a week and get the urine.

(And use that in your lure?)

Yup. But we've kind of quit that because, you know, it's kind of a mess, you know. A lot of things that was maybe kind of cool in them days we don't do any more.

11:51

(And it sounds like lures are now very widely available.)

They are. I got a magazine here yesterday, they put out—there's twenty pages of lures in that [pause] deal, you know.

(So some are very effective?)

Yeah, they are. They didn't used to be. But they got a—these places that make the scents really got it down good now.

(For any other animals that you trap, what did you use for lures?)

Like, bear and lion, we usually use their kill. That's what we usually use. [pause] But lion and bears altogether—the older the kill is, the better the bears like it, but the lions likes fresh stuff. But it was against the law for us to use any game animal. We couldn't use any game animal.

(So you'd have to use then, like, a fresh sheep?)

Right, right.

(That had to make it kind of tough, because you had to get there pretty fast for the lion.)

Yeah. Mostly the lion was—they weren't as bad to catch as bears. Them bears, they can really run a long ways. [pause] I was just talking to that trapper last night. They'd got a bear this week and that guy had been offered \$5500 for a dog, and the bear killed it. They said he was just sick. But you get a good dog, you don't sell 'em, you know.

(So usually bears are caught now with dogs and snares?)

Right, right.

13:52

(What is your favorite trap to use?)

Favorite trap? Oh, #3 Victor trap is all I've ever used.

(Why do you like it more than others?)

Oh, I don't know. It's just the right size. Pret' near all I've ever used, you know. But that's my favorite trap.

(For coyotes?)

Yeah.

(Every trapper seems to make some kind of modification on a trap that they buy. Do you make modifications?)

No modifications. Just keep 'em clean.

(Really?)

That's the main thing. We have to boil 'em. We have certain things we boil 'em that makes them about this color. It takes all the sand and everything out.

(So it makes them black?)

Pret' near black. That's the main thing. You've got to keep everything clean in trappin'.

(Describe the boiling and how that works.)

You just put it in—usually get a barrel you happen to. We used to use sage brush and put it in the thing, but now they got a chemical that's real good that don't have any smell. You just put that in there, put your trap in the barrel, and boil it for about four or five hours. They come out black and it really makes a difference trappin'.

15:24

(How have your trapping techniques changed over the years?)

They've changed completely. [laughs]

(Really? How so?)

Because of—now, I don't know whether you understand these M44s. They're a cyanide gun. You probably know about them. We have twenty-one regulations on them. That's made a difference.

(You used to not have those many regulations on the M44s, right?)

You didn't have to tell nobody. When I first started, I used to set three hundred of them out in the wintertime.

(M44s?)

Right. Now I set out about seventy-five.

(And you probably have to tell exactly where they are?)

I do. You have to put a sign going into every road. If you've got one gun down there for ten miles, you've got to put a sign up. We have to put signs up. We have to put signs right by the—about between ten and fifteen feet from the gun, a sign on the brush or somethin'. And we have to have two people know where they're at. [pause] On my job right now, I can only have—at the most I can only take care of about a hundred.

(M44s?)

We don't put them out until about the first of October, on the desert. We don't use them on the forest on account of so many people, just too dangerous.

(So it's only a winter tool in the desert?)

I put them out the first of October and keep them there until the first of March.

(You also mentioned using 1080 in the early days?)

Yeah, we used to put out a bunch of that. I used to, we used to kill about a hundred head of sheep and cut 'em in two and poison them and put them out and then we'd have to pick everything up. We had to pick them up. Myself, I was glad to see that go. We couldn't have that now with people the way they are.

(You used to put 1080 out also in the winter, right?)

Right, we'd put it out about the first of October and pick it up about March.

(What made you glad to see that method go?)

What?

(What made you glad to see that method go?)

Because of people, you know. You was always killing something.

(Other animals?)

Well, not other animals, but people's dogs and stuff. We couldn't have it now. No way we could put any poison any place on account of snow machines, four-wheelers. People everywhere. And it's made quite a difference with the cyanide guns. We had to be real selective where we put things. We just can't go out there and—what I do is, I use a four-wheeler a lot on this job. I used to ride a mule all the time, but—I've still got a mule. But anyway, I like these old roads for four-wheelers that people don't even use. That's where I try to set my stuff.

(Your traps?)

Well, I'm not so scared for my traps. But them M44s, you know, they might kill somebody. They never have, but you worry about 'em.

19:08

(And you also mentioned in terms of changes of trapping techniques that bears used to be able to be trapped, and now they have to be snared.)

Yeah, right.

(Any other changes?)

Oh, you know, everything we've got, we got more regulations on. You take a tool like that M44, it has twenty-one restrictions that we can't do. We can't put them so far from the water, so far from the hill, so far from this or so far from that. And that's made quite a difference. But not too bad. We can live with most of it. I think the biggest thing is people.

(Really?)

The biggest drawback we've got's people. You can't go any place any more where there are not people.

(So it's people all over, the amount of people?)

Everywhere. They're on them four-wheelers, they go everyplace. Back then, when we were usin' that 1080, we didn't have very many lion hunters. Now there's lion hunters everyplace. You can't believe the lion hunters in the country.

(People doing it for sport?)

Right. Years ago, when I started, I was about the only one that had dogs in this country. Now there's probably ten people with dogs that hunt lions, just for the sport of it, you know. And then there's really a lot of dude huntin' going on.

(Dude hunting?)

Uh-huh. So we have to stay out of them forests with traps and everything on account of people with dogs. It's made quite a difference.

21:06

(How about the livestock protection collar with the 1080? Have you used much of that?)

I sure haven't, but I read quite a bit about it. In certain areas they work good. But you'd have to have fenced areas, you know, and the areas I work, none of it's fenced, you know. It would really work good in a pasture. If I had sheep, I'd want them done, because I think they'd work good in certain areas. But everything has got to be just right to use that.

(It seems that you have a lot of tools, but you have to know what tool to use.)

Yeah, you do, and you gotta be—we didn't have to be careful with tools like we do now, you know. We didn't have people out everyplace. You can go on this desert, I don't care what time of day you want to go, there's somebody out there.

(Even when you go in the morning?)

Yeah. They're out there hunting coyotes or doing somethin'. See, in this county there's a twenty-dollar bounty on coyotes.

(Really?)

And you got quite a few people huntin' them.

(They shoot them? Dogs?)

Mostly shoot 'em, yeah. Callin'. Everybody's got a callin' machine, you know. And this guy I was telling you about that shot 3500 coyotes, he told me, "Some day these coyotes are going to quit howling." That's how we locate them. Some's already quit.

(Quit howling?)

I asked Milt McQueary why they howl and he said, "Oh, just communication." And I guess that's right. But in some areas, they've used it so much that them coyotes is gettin' wise to it.

23:07

(Interesting. If you had a grandchild asking about your trapping secrets, if you had trapping secrets, what would you tell your grandchild?)

Oh, first I'd tell 'em that the first thing they gotta have is a lot of ambition. [chuckles] 'Cause you just don't go out there. You don't catch nothing if you don't work. You got to be clean. You gotta have all your stuff clean. There's some things that you can't tell a person. They gotta learn by experience. The main thing, being a good trapper is puttin' it in the right place at the right time in the right sand. You can put a trap two feet away from where you should put it and never catch nothin'. You can move it two feet and catch coyotes. You can't make a coyote go to a trap. You've got to have it just natural, so it can walk by it. And that's hard to teach a guy. They gotta learn that theirselves, a lot of this stuff they do.

(Just learn over the years?)

Right. I can go out with a new trapper, just started, and he could teach me somethin'. It's funny how [pause] everybody's got different ideas. Every time I'd go with that new—when I was teaching guys to trap, I would go with them quite a bit when they started. They'd teach me something.

(What will trapping and wildlife management be like fifty years in the future?)

Boy, I don't know. It depends. If they keep sheep and stuff and livestock going, they're always gonna have to have protection. But we got so many ranges out here right now that they've taken

the sheep off of, and so nothing's being done. Across this mountain here, all across this Richfield Mountain, clear across there, the only thing done there, we do some work with the helicopter, because it's just [pause] too rough and we don't have the money to put trappers on there. In that kind of country, if they don't work it, they're going to lose deer and everything else. They are doing a lot of work with the helicopter now. [pause] But if there's any livestock in there, they've gotta control them, and I can see this wolf problem really being a problem.

(Wolf? Because wolves were reintroduced?)

They're going to be reintroduced. They'll be here before long.

(So there are no wolves in this area?)

No, there are not.

(Were there ever?)

Yeah, there was. I think the last wolf in Utah was killed by a guy that used to live up east of Kanosh.

(When was that? Was it during your time of work?)

Just before my time, not too much before.

27:01

(What do you see is the problem with wolves?)

Oh....game animals and livestock both. They can just kill anything.

(What do you see as the biggest challenges facing people in your line of work?)

I think the biggest challenge is learnin' how to put up with people. [chuckles] That's the biggest challenge I think there is. [pause] You gotta—you know, you can't tell people to stay out. You gotta put up with them, you know. I think that's gonna be—I think that's one of the biggest problems, is the people we have to work around, I guess you'd say. And also the livestock industry, whether they keep sheep or if they go out of the sheep business, it's gonna make quite a bit of difference. Same way with cattle. If they ever take cattle off public grounds, or anything like that, you know, it's gonna make a difference. [pause] As long as you've got livestock and deer herds and game, you're gonna have to control 'em some way.

(You said there's been a lot of controlling of deer, er, fawns, protecting fawns recently.)

Yup.

(Is that new?)

Yeah, we didn't—years ago Fish and Game didn't want us trapping, you know. I had a guy down in Clear Lake, there's a big refuge down there, he wouldn't let me on there.

(Because he didn't want you trapping coyotes?)

Yeah. And now this guy, he's working with sheepmen, if he hears a coyote how he wants me down there, you know. [chuckles]

29:14

(What other hobbies or interests do you have?)

You know, that's my problem.

(Really?)

Yup. If I had hobbies, I could probably retire and go do 'em.

(This is your hobby, it sounds like.)

Right. I don't know. It really makes a bad deal when you get this age and no hobbies. [pause] But I don't know what I—I'm too late now to change, you know, one thing or another.

(As I said, your work, your trapping is your hobby.)

Yeah, if it wasn't I wouldn't be doin' it. Because I'm not getting paid nothin' to speak of. [pause] You talk to Phil Taylor and he'll probably say the same thing.

(Really?)

Yup. A lot of the things that I'm tellin' you, I'll bet he'll tell you, too.

(We're getting close to the end of my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to add?)

Oh, the only thing I'd say, I've enjoyed every day of work. I spent too much time on this job that I shoulda spent with my family when I was young, but I didn't. I was too busy. And I had two boys and I took them quite a bit, but there's a lot of things I didn't go to that I should've.

(Because of work?)

Yeah. And I was always gone. I'd leave Monday morning and get home Friday night.

(And stay overnight places?)

Yeah. When I was trappin' I used to take a sleepin' bag and stay up with the sheepherders on the mountain, you know. That's the only one regret I got, is not spendin' more time with the family.

31:27

(It sounds like in the early days it was a very, very full-time job.)

It was, yeah.

(And hard if you had a family.)

It is. These trappers, it's tough for them to—married guys, this job's really tough on marriages.

(Because it sounds like the early days, you would pack in with your horse and as you said, that was part of the job.)

Yeah. We used to have what they called a teepee tent. Now the guys have got all nice camps, really nice sheep camps, you know.

(What was a teepee tent?)

Just a little tent with some poles you could pack on a horse and put it up when you got there.

(And that was your tent?)

Mm-hmm.

(So you had to take all your food and everything in with you?)

Yeah. Mm-hmm. [pause] And we used to eat quite a bit with the shepherders. But nowadays that don't work. So many of them are immigrants and they can't understand English and it's altogether different. That's a different situation than it used to be.

(And the packing in probably is done, too. Do people do that much any more?)

They don't do it at all any more. We used to have some—when I first started trappin', I had about seven herd of sheep you couldn't get to in the car. You had to pack in to 'em. That's all changed now.

33:06

(Well, that is all I have for questions, Bob. If you don't have anything else, we will end.)

Well, I can't think of—all I can say is, if I had to live my life over again, I'd probably do the same thing, I'd just make a few changes. Because I've enjoyed all, all the years.

(Sounds like it. All right. Thank you very much. This is the end of the interview with Bob Oppenheimer, CD Number 1.)

33:39 End of file 2. End of interview.